

VIII. OPERATIONS ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

Division of Parks and Recreation staff identified the major park issues facing Lake Waccamaw State Park at the initiation of the general management plan process. The issues have been divided into three categories: natural resources (see Chapter VI), capital improvements (see Chapter VII) and operations. This chapter identifies park operations issues and makes recommendations for addressing them during the next five years. Operations issues for Lake Waccamaw State Park that are of significant concern are:

- Lack of housing
- Lake access for park vessels
- Service/maintenance road through picnic area
- Need for tent and trailer camping
- Park drinking water
- Pier and buoy inspections
- Prescribed burning needs
- Planning needs

LACK OF HOUSING

Lack of staff housing in the park has recently been addressed with the construction of a ranger residence. A second residence is needed to provide better coverage, particularly when one ranger is away or off duty. The need for a second residence will become greater with construction of a tent and trailer campground at the park. A capital improvement project to construct the campground exists but is not yet funded.

Recommendation

With additional land acquisition planned for the park, investigate land acquisition that might include a house that could adequately serve as a ranger residence. If such an acquisition cannot be found, construction of an additional ranger residence should be considered at the time the campground is developed.

LAKE ACCESS FOR PARK VESSELS

There is no boating access within the park. Until the recent acquisition at Deep Creek, the water along the park's shoreline was not deep enough for boating access. Currently, park staff must trailer boats to a county-operated public boat ramp outside the park entrance – at least a 30-minute round trip process - in order to respond to incidents, conduct patrols, inspect piers, and any other situation that requires staff

presence on the water. Staff time is wasted in loading and unloading and transporting vessels to and from the water. Furthermore, access to the lake from the closest boat ramp is hindered by a narrow, meandering channel that slows response time. During occasional periods of high water, the park boat will not pass under a bridge between the ramp and lake, requiring use of a more distant access that adds an additional hour to the round trip process.

Emergencies are seasonal and infrequent, but will certainly increase as lake use rises. In emergency situations, getting a boat out on the lake now takes far too long. In addition, there are 480 piers and nearly 300 mooring buoys at Lake Waccamaw, and each one requires an annual inspection.

Recommendation

Build or improve a facility that will allow a boat to be left on the lake. Recently acquired property at Deep Creek provides sufficient water depth to either improve an existing dock or construct a new one. This action will provide for quicker response time in emergencies and better efficiency when conducting pier inspections.

SERVICE/MAINTENANCE ROAD THROUGH PICNIC AREA

Currently, a road that bisects the picnic area provides access to the maintenance area, the primitive campsites, and a NOAA weather monitoring station. This road is gated to control non-authorized use, but its presence takes away from the visitor experience and is a potential safety hazard. Pedestrians commonly use the road as a pathway to the boardwalk that leads to the lake and pier. The picnic area currently has tables, grills, drinking water and restrooms.

Recommendations

Eliminate the existing problem of the road through the picnic area by relocating the maintenance area and by creating a new picnic area/day use area adjacent to the visitor's center. Convert the existing picnic area/day use area to a group camp. The existing parking lot can serve as parking for the group campers, and the existing toilet building can be converted to a washhouse. The new site plan update showing these recommended changes and the capital improvement projects to implement them are contained in Chapter VII.

NEED FOR TENT AND TRAILER CAMPING

In the 1977 *State Lakes Master Plan*, the bay lake area of southeastern North Carolina was seen as a potential recreational destination for families from across the state. Due to the lack of a tent and trailer campground at Lake Waccamaw, potential users are routinely turned away from Lake Waccamaw State Park and its recreational and educational opportunities.

The private campgrounds in the Lake Waccamaw area are mainly available on a long-term, seasonal basis and fail to provide an option for the casual weekend camper. Within ten years, Interstate 74 is slated by NCDOT to come through the area along the current route of US 74, bringing with it the chance to introduce even more visitors to Lake Waccamaw State Park. The interstate highway would be passing approximately six miles from the park entrance.

Recommendation

Develop a tent and trailer campground that would draw visitors to the Lake Waccamaw area to learn about one of the most truly unique lakes in North Carolina. A location for the proposed campground has been identified as a part of this general management plan and is shown on the site plan update contained in Chapter VII of this document. A capital improvement project to develop the campground is also described in Chapter VII.

PARK DRINKING WATER

The Lake Waccamaw Visitor's Center is currently supplied by well water that is consistently discolored and has a slight odor. Chlorination and water softening is also required to make the water useable. Monthly water testing is also a requirement of the current water system. The charge for this sampling service is \$15.00 per month with a yearly contract fee of \$180.00.

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to connecting the visitor's center to the Town of Lake Waccamaw's water supply. Consideration should also be given to connecting other park facilities when constructed. Connection of the visitor's center to the town's water can be achieved by running a line less than 1,000 feet in length. The town's supply is reliable and clean, and it will not require monthly water sampling. The connection fee is \$250. Water will cost \$11.75 a month per 4,000 gallons used.

As a part of the residence construction project, a tee will be installed that will facilitate connection of the park to town water in the future. In the meantime, the park superintendent will have tests run on the parks well water to identify any problems.

PIER AND BUOY INSPECTIONS

Lake Waccamaw has 495 piers and nearly 300 mooring buoys. Buoy and pier-related issues, both inspections and permit investigations, take a great deal of ranger time that could be used for interpretive and educational programming and other resource management responsibilities such as controlled burns. Requests for interpretive and educational programs have been turned down upon occasion. The recent focus on pier inspections and safety will only increase the amount of time that is required of park staff.

Recommendations

Establish a new ranger position that would improve Lake Waccamaw State Park's interpretive programs that emphasize one of North Carolina's most significant water resources. The position would also allow improved capability to annually inspect piers as required by State Lakes Regulations. As an alternative, contractual services could be used to address all or specific issues relating to private piers and buoys on Lake Waccamaw. Add a peak load office assistant for three months during the winter to assure that someone would be available in the visitor's center as a contact person on weekends and to assist with preparations for the permit renewal process that starts in March.

PREScribed BURNING NEEDS

Lake Waccamaw State Park consists of ecosystems that for thousands of years were burned when frequent, natural fires moved through the Coastal Plain. These fires left behind a patchwork of diversity in plants and wonderful habitats for animal species in our area. Today, prescribed burning is used to mimic what was once the natural fire regime. Unfortunately, few parks in North Carolina - including Lake Waccamaw - have the staff or resources to adequately conduct burns. Ecological benefits are not the only concerns, for the reduction of hazardous fuel loads is a critical park safety issue at Lake Waccamaw as well as in many parks.

Recommendation

Establish an additional Park Ranger II position for Lake Waccamaw to take the lead role in developing burn prescriptions, preparing units for burning, and to participate on a Division burn team which would be equipped and outfitted to travel from park to park, depending on weather conditions, to assist staff in conducting burns. Individual parks could use memorandums of understanding in an effort to garner additional assistance from agencies such as The Nature Conservancy that also have an interest in managing lands or in preserving biodiversity. An interagency fire council could be developed to discuss fire-related issues and be used in lobbying and educational efforts in the area of prescribed burning.

PLANNING NEEDS

The *Lake Waccamaw State Park Master Plan* was published in 1976 and has served to guide park development since that time. It is outdated and a new plan to guide future park development is needed. Land acquisition to date and future acquisitions may open options for different recreational uses and lead to the need for additional planning. While planning has been ongoing through the years, few of these ideas have been recorded in drawings or maps.

Recommendation

Develop an updated plan to guide current and future park development. (As a part of this general management plan, an updated plan to guide current and future development has been developed and is contained in Chapter VII.) Continue to review and update the development plan as needed in future revisions of the general management plan.

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